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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 000548

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: ZARDARI AGREES TO APPEAL SHARIFS' DISQUALIFICATION

REF: ISLAMABAD 545

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

¶1. (C) Ambassador and UK High Commissioner (Ambassador) had dinner with President Zardari March 14. Right before the meeting, Zardari had issued a statement indicating his government's intention to request a review of the Supreme Court's decision on the eligibility of the Sharif brothers to hold public office, as well as a willingness to consider restoration of the judges under the principles of the 2006 Charter of Democracy agreed to by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N). Zardari said the review would consist of the same panel of judges that first heard the case, with the addition of a senior judge. He said his statement was to fulfill the commitment he had made to Foreign Secretary Miliband and subsequently confirmed to the Secretary and Ambassador Holbrooke. Zardari now wanted the UK to follow up and mediate with the Sharif brothers since "the next step was up to them." The UK High Commissioner said that he would be meeting with Shahbaz Sharif the next day (March 15). Both of us characterized President Zardari's statement as a positive first step in undertaking a dialogue.

¶2. (C) Zardari said that he did not expect governor's rule to last for much longer, and he was trying to form a government in the Punjab.

¶3. (C) Discussion about next steps on the judiciary will be reported septel.

¶4. (C) As reported reftel, the Governor of the Punjab has been planning to place under house arrest some PML-N activists, including members of the provincial assembly. Both Ambassador and UK High Commissioner characterized this as a serious mistake: Zardari instructed the Governor not to do it. We also learned the government was considering putting the Sharif brothers under house arrest tomorrow (March 15) to prevent them from participating in the rally in Lahore. Zardari confirmed this was a possibility. The government certainly had threat information about suicide bombers trying to infiltrate the lawyers' "long march," and the political consequences of an assassination of the Sharif brothers would inevitably be blamed on the PPP government, argued Zardari. We urged Zardari not to restrict the Sharif brothers, a step which would have very negative reactions in the international community. He said he would not.

¶5. (U) Begin Text: Statement by Presidential Spokesperson Farhatullah Babar: Islamabad March 14, 2009

The federal government will file a review petition in the Supreme Court against the verdict of the Supreme Court disqualifying Mian Nawaz Sharif and Mian Shahbaz Sharif from electoral politics.

The decision was taken during a meeting between the Prime Minister and the President in the Presidency when the latter called on him Saturday evening.

Minister of Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas Mr. Qamar Zaman Kaira (Note: also the new Information Minister.) and Minister for Labour and Manpower Syed Kurshid Shah were also present in the meeting.

Both the president and Prime Minister agreed that the issue of judiciary and restoration of judges would be resolved in accordance with the principles laid down in the Charter of Democracy, a document signed by both the former Prime Ministers Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and Mian Nawaz Sharif.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister has also taken all the alliance partners into confidence on the decisions taken. The Prime Minister telephone Asfundyar Wali Khan, President ANP, Maulana Fazlur Rehman Chief of JUI-F, Mr. Altaf Hussain, Chief of MQM, Munir Aurakzai and Mir Israullah Zehri. End Text.  
PATTERSON